

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PARIS 37203 161708Z
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AMEMBASSY LOME
AMEMBASSY NIAMEY
AMEMBASSY CONAKRY
AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOU

C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 37203

E.O.11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR MARR FR XY
SUBJ: QUAI COMMENTS ON WEST AFRICAN DEFENSE THINKING

1. DURING CALL DEC 15 BY AF/W DIRECTOR THOMAS SMITH, COUNTRY OFFICER KILLION AND EMBOFF, QUAI ACTING DEPUTY DIRECTOR CHAUVET SAID THAT SINCE THE ANGOLAN CRISIS, WEST AFRICAN LEADERS, NOTABLY SENGHOR, HOUPHOUET, EYADEMA AND LAMIZANA, HAVE BEEN STUDYING THEIR DEFENSE PROBLEMS WITH INCREASED CONCERN. A PROPOSAL THAT CHAUVET SAID WAS PARENTED BY SENGHOR FOR A MULTILATERAL NONAGRESSION AGREEMENT AMONG MODERATES LIKE SENEGAL, IVORY COAST, MAURITANIA, NIGER, UPPER
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PAGE 02 PARIS 37203 161708Z

VOLTA AND TOGO HAS BEEN UNDER CONSIDERATION. FEARS OF MALI BASED ON SOVIET ARMS SHIPMENTS TO THAT COUNTRY ARE THE IMPETUS FOR THE SUGGESTED GROUPING, CHAUVET SAID, BUT GUINEA, GUINEA-BISSAU AND BENIN ALSO WOULD FEEL TARGETTED.

2. A BROADER PROPOSAL FOR A REGIONAL DEFENSE ZONE IS UNDER CONSIDERATION, TOO. CHAUVET COMMENTED THAT IF THE AFRICANS WENT THAT FAR, GUINEA WOULD CONSIDER ITSELF DIRECTLY THREATENED, AND WITH SOME JUSTIFICATION.

3. THE FRENCH CURRENTLY HAVE NO REAL POLICY TOWARDS ARMS DELIVERIES TO THE REGION, CHAUVET ADMITTED. SHIPMENTS ARE MADE ON A CASE BY CASE BASIS, IN RESPONSE TO PRESSURES FROM AFRICAN LEADERS, AVAILABILITIES, PURCHASING ABILITY AND VARIOUS POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS. BUT PARIS IS CURRENTLY EXAMINING THE IDEA OF A MULTILATERAL DEFENSE ARRANGEMENT IN CONNECTION WITH THE REGIONAL DEFENSE ZONE SUGGESTION. IT WOULD INVOLVE GLOBAL ARMS SUPPLIES OF MIRAGES, AMX TANKS, RECONNAISSANCE PLANES, ETC., TO AFRICAN BASES HELD IN COMMON. SUCH A POLICY, HE NOTED, WOULD REQUIRE DIFFICULT DECISIONS ON WHICH ARMS WOULD BE MULTINATIONAL AND WHICH BINATIONALLY CONTROLLED.

4. CHAUVET EMPHASIZED THAT THINKING ON THESE MATTERS, BOTH AFRICAN AND FRENCH, IS FLUID. ON THE FRENCH SIDE, POLICY IS BEING REVIEWED LARGELY BECAUSE THE NEW FOREIGN MINISTER, AS WELL AS THE MINISTER OF DEFENSE, BELIEVES FRANCE SHOULD DEVELOP SOME REAL AFRICAN ARMS POLICY. SUMMARIZING, CHAUVET SAID "REFLECTIONS ARE TAKING PLACE."

5. COMMENT: THIS IS THE FIRST WE HAVE HEARD ABOUT SENGHOR'S REPORTED PROPOSAL. AT FIRST BLUSH, BOTH IT AND THE BROADER DEFENSE ZONE PROPOSAL APPEAR TO BE MORE CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 PARIS 37203 161708Z

KNEE-JERK REACTIONS TO SOVIET-CUBAN INTERVENTION IN ANGOLA THAN PROPOSITIONS WHICH ARE LIKELY TO BE ADOPTED. HOWEVER, TO THE EXTENT THAT GOF APPEARS TO BE ENGAGED IN A PLANNING EXERCISE WITH RESPECT TO A REGIONAL ARMS DELIVERY PROGRAM, THIS MIGHT BE AN APPROPRIATE TIME FOR THE USG TO CONSIDER SUGGESTING SOME CONVENTIONAL ARMS LIMITATION CONCEPTS SUCH AS A CEILING ON SOPHISTICATION, FOR EXAMNLE.
RUSH

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